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FROM : BRUSSELS 65, July 26, 1950

REF : Embassy Secret Despatches 289, March 2, 1950, 583, April 27, 1950, 667, May 16, 1950.

SUBJECT : THE BELGIAN ROYAL QUESTION: ELECTIONS OF JUNE 4, 1950 AND RETURN OF LEOPOLD III

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1. ELECTIONS OF JUNE 4, 1950

For the third time in less than a year the Belgian people voted on the issue of whether or not their King in exile, Leopold III, should be restored to his royal prerogatives.

Following the "Popular Consultation" of March 12, 1950 in which 57.8% of the electorate indicated that they would wish to see the King back in Belgium, an attempt was made as described in Despatch 667 to effect a national compromise between the proponents of Leopold's return without conditions and the opponents of the King who felt that he could come back only to abdicate in favor of the Crown Prince Baudouin. At one time it seemed that the three major parties were on the point of signing a protocol which would delineate the terms of a compromise, following the King's own offer made in a nation-wide broadcast on April 15 to step down "temporarily" from the throne in favor of his eldest son pending such time as he, guided by the majority opinion of the country, might find it possible to resume his functions as King. However, the intended compromise failed [redacted] B-1 [redacted] Accordingly the Cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Eyskens submitted its resignation and general elections were called for June 4, 1950. Although the various parties submitted pro forma platforms, the one issue of the election was whether or not by constitutional means King Leopold should be invited to cease his exile and return to the Belgian throne.

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a. Apathy

Since the nerve of political sensibility had been so often harped on in the course of three elections within twelve months, there was not much reaction left in the body

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politic when the voters trooped once more to the polls on Sunday, June 4. Not only was the electorate emotionally worn out and apathetic, but party war funds were low, most of the campaign chests having been drained of francs during the violent electioneering campaign which preceded the Popular Consultation on March 12. On the eve of the elections it was generally felt that the overall picture pro and con the King would be little changed although many observers agreed that the Liberal party, which stood in between the out-and-out pro-Leopold PSC and the out-and-out anti-Leopold Socialist parties, stood to lose most heavily at the polls (1).

b. The Returns

The election returns showed that the PSC or Social Christian party had gained 108 seats in the Chamber or an increase of three, the Socialists 77 seats, augmenting their ranks by 11 new deputies, the Liberals 20 seats or a loss of 9, and the Communists 7, losing 5. Of Senators directly elected the PSC retained its former score of 54. The Socialists gained 4 seats to a total of 37. The Liberals lost 2, retaining 12 senators, and the Communists also lost 2 seats reducing their number to 3.(2) However, it will be recalled that under the Belgian proportional system of voting approximately one third of the Senate is filled by a vote of communal councils and by a vote of the Senate itself. The following table, therefore, sets forth the present composition of the Senate and Lower House following completion of the Senate roster by votes in the provincial councils and the Senate (3):

Belgian Parliament After Elections June 4, 1950

(Parenthetical figures show change from previous Parliament)

	Chamber	Senate
PSC	108 (plus 3)	91 (minus 1)
Soc.	77 (plus 11)	62 (plus 9)
Lib.	20 (minus 9)	19 (minus 5)
Com.	7 (minus 5)	3 (minus 3)
	212	175

Senate Breakdown

	Directly Elected	Provincial Council	Coopted	Total
PSC	54 (0)	25 (0)	12 (-1)	91(-1)
Soc.	37 (+4)	17 (+4)	8 (+1)	62(+9)
Lib.	12 (-2)	4 (-3)	3 (0)	19(-5)
Com.	3 (-2)	0 (-1)	--	3(-3)
	106	46	23	175

(1) Embtel 869, June 2, 1950. (2) Embtel 894, June 6, 1950. SECRET
(3) Moniteur Officiel.

Belgian Parliament, etc.(Cont'd)

P.S.C. Majority

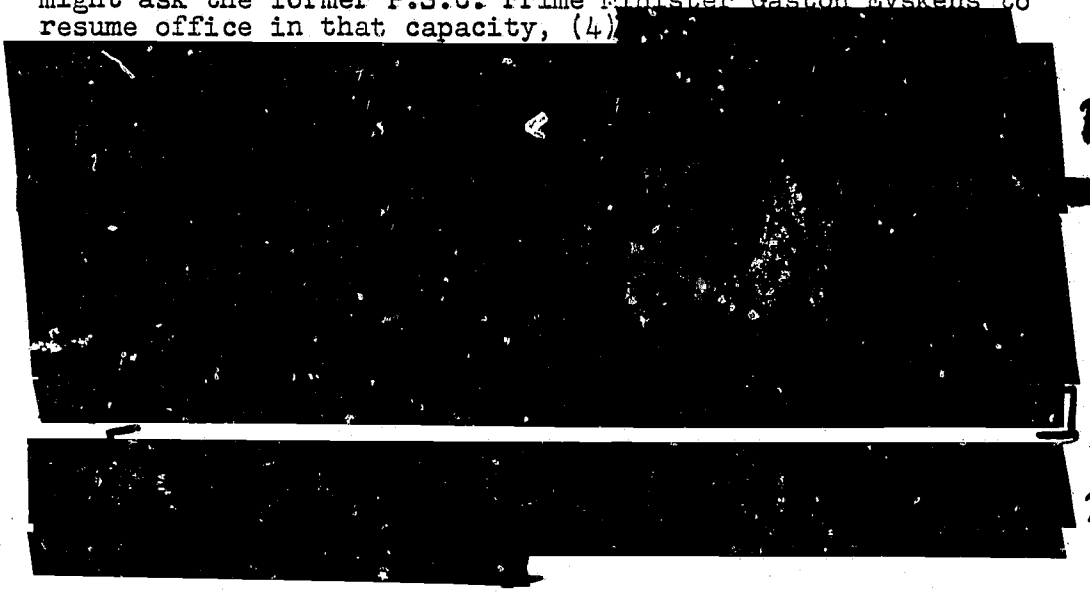
Chamber..... 4
Senate..... 7
Combined Houses.....11

The total vote on June 4 was 4,942,807. Of this the following table shows the breakdown by parties: (2)

	Chamber		Senate	
	Total votes: 4,942,807		Total votes: 4,911,938	
	Votes	% of Total	Votes	% of Total
P.S.C.	2,356,608	47.7	2,347,242	47.8
Socialists	1,705,781	34.5	1,691,792	34.4
Liberals	556,102	11.2	549,344	11.2
Communists	234,541	4.8	236,492	4.8
Liberal-Socialist Cartel & Others	89,775	1.8	87,063	1.8

2. FORMATION OF DUVIEUSART GOVERNMENT

Although initial rumor suggested that the Prince Regent might ask the former P.S.C. Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens to resume office in that capacity, (4)



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On the same day, June 6, the P.S.C. National Committee decided to form a homogenous government under the former Minister of Economic Affairs, M. Jean Duvieusart (6). On June 8 M. Duvieusart formed his government which on the

(2)Embtel 894, June 6, 1950, (4)Embtel 880, June 3, 1950.
(5)Embtel 893, June 6, 1950, (6)Embtel 896, June 6, 1950.

whole, although retaining previous ministers from the former Eyskens cabinet, showed a number of new names including men of youth and energy, if not of great political experience (7). The average age of the new cabinet was 50. [redacted] B-1 in the important post of Minister of Interior [redacted] B-1 the former incumbent, M. De Vleeschauwer, [redacted] retained his portfolio, while the Ministry for Foreign Affairs remained as before in the hands of Paul Van Zeeland, [redacted] B-1

3. VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

The new government having been formed, it tabled a lengthy statement of policy for debate before the two houses of Parliament, confident in its majority in both chambers that, in spite of the length and bitterness of the debate, a vote of confidence eventually would be given. Meanwhile, on June 26 Prime Minister Duvieusart flew to Geneva for his first meeting with King Leopold (8). On his return he said that he had discussed not only the Royal Question but a variety of other problems and that the King would return to Belgium only after the decision of Parliament (9).

In the debate on the government's declaration, the PSC [redacted] decided upon a policy of forebearance. The B-1 opposition, led by the Socialists, and consisting also of the Liberals and Communists, rehashed [redacted] B-1 all the arguments against Leopold as King. At last on June 30 the Chamber of Representatives by a majority of 8 voted to accept the declaration of policy of the Duvieusart cabinet and in the small hours of the morning of July 5 the Senate gave its vote of confidence by a majority of 7. In consequence, the Prince Regent [redacted] B-1 [redacted] invoked Article 82 of the Constitution and the law of July 19, 1945, which declared the "impossibility of reigning of Leopold III", and convened the Chamber and Senate to meet as one united National Assembly on July 6 at 2:00 P.M.(10).

4. NO BI-PARTISAN FOREIGN POLICY: KOREA

During this [redacted] the aggression of North B-1 Korea against the Republic of Korea took place. On June 29 while the American Ambassador sat in the diplomatic box, Foreign Minister Van Zeeland read a statement pledging the Belgian government's support to the United Nations and the United States in the Korean crisis. When the Foreign Minister finished speaking he was vigorously applauded from the PSC benches but the Socialists, Liberals, and Communists remained silent. [redacted] B-1

(7) Embtel 913, June 8, 1950.
(8) Embtel 984, June 23, 1950.
(9) La Nation Belge, June 28, 1950.
(10) Embtel 13, July 5, 1950.

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[redacted] B-1

5. MEETING OF THE JOINT ASSEMBLY

a. Socialist Manifestation in Honor of Prince Regent

The Socialists' [redacted] struggle B-1 continued to the end. On July 8 they organized a monster demonstration in Brussels of ostensible "homage" to the Prince Regent who now seemed very obviously a departing head of state. Although police sources said that only 29,000 marchers participated in the parade, [redacted] in- B-1 sisted to the writer that there were no less than 50,000 participants and it seems admitted on all sides that counting those in the manifestation plus spectators at least 100,000 people devoted their Saturday afternoon, July 8, either actively or passively to the demonstration in favor of the Prince. [redacted] B-1

b. The Debate: Filibuster

The debate on the so-called application of the law of July 19, 1945, which in effect would determine whether the Regency would terminate and Leopold return, dragged on from July 6 to July 19. The Socialist-Liberal-Communist coalition continued [redacted] delaying tactics. In a series B-1 of tumultuous sessions [redacted] these politicians con- B-1 ducted a long drawn-out filibuster. At length, having exhausted every device to prolong discussion on matters purely of procedure the anti-Leopoldists then rehashed [redacted] arguments against the King's return, the B-1 PSC representatives steadfastly maintaining their policy of not participating in the substantive debate.

c. Socialist Strikes Ineffective

The next tactic of the Socialists was to call a strike in Wallonia where the majority of the population had three times indicated by ballot that it was opposed to the King's return. It was significant, however, that at the last moment the strike had to be called off, an indication not only that the Socialists' Labor Federation, the F.G.T.B., was low on strike-support funds but also of general apathy and fatigue among the workers. A wild-cat strike in the Charleroi area

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(11) Embtel 5, July 3; Despatch 888, July 3,1950.
(12) [redacted] July 11, 1950; B-1
Le Soir, July 9, 1950.

was the only demonstration which took place on July 12 (13). Undoubtedly there were many Belgians, including some of the Socialist workers themselves, who were impressed by the statement made by Prime Minister Duvieusart in an exclusive interview to United Press July 11 when he said, (13)

> "We have always respected the rights of the minority and have always given proof of much patience***We have a majority acquired through democratic means. If the Socialists have recourse to violence they will be condemned by public opinion. The workers have the right to strike to gain their social objectives, but since they have obtained universal suffrage it seems illogical that they should go on strike for political reasons. Strikes as a means of political action are not democratic."

d. Atmosphere at Close of Debate: A House Divided Against Itself

Events now moved rapidly to their inevitable denouement. On Thursday July 20 the debate finally having been closed, the vote was taken which restored Leopold III to the throne of Belgium. The atmosphere was tense, as many Deputies and Senators still had in their ears the echoes of the speech of a former Liberal minister, M. Rey, who, despite the impassioned eloquence of Spaak, undoubtedly made the most effective oration of this troubled session. Referring to the constant Liberal attempt, pursued even to the last minute, to achieve a national accord on the basis of the King's message of April 15 and on the almost-achieved protocol of April 22, the former Minister said,

> "I am going to tell you what they think in certain quarters in certain of our towns. I wish to show you the depth of the division of opinion in this country. That is the problem. Some magistrates of the Court of Appeals have asked me, 'Is it true that the King will return?' Do you understand the atmosphere which the King will encounter? Do you believe that he will dare to place one foot in one town? No, you cannot take the responsibility of asking him to set foot in Liège, Charleroi, Tournai, Mons, Brussels, the capital, and perhaps Ghent, where half the citizens have voted against him."

Concluding, the Liberal ex-minister said that he knew as fact that many of the PSC representatives if polled by secret ballot

(13) Embtel 51, July 12, 1950.
Embtel 53, July 12, 1950.

would vote against the King. Recalling that the King himself in a previous message had said that whatever Parliament's decision might be, he would abide by it and that if the National Assembly thought he should not be restored in his prerogatives he would withdraw in order to spare the country from grave political disorder, M. Rey asked the PSC benches if they fully understood the responsibility they took upon themselves. He said it was only necessary for ten among them to vote with the opposition in order that the King should not return and that the Royal Question might be settled (14).

To this the best answer had previously been given by the Prime Minister in his interview with United Press July 11 when he staunchly maintained the right of a majority in a democracy to follow the dictates of that majority.

e. The Final Vote: Restoration of King

At all events no opinions were changed in the emotional and bitter debate of the Joint Assembly. As indicated above, on July 20 the final vote was taken. Before the roll call was made, however, the Socialists, all the Liberals save one, and the Communist Deputies and Senators marched from the hall. For a moment there was a graphic demonstration of the division of Belgian opinion on Leopold III. Almost half of the seats in Parliament were empty. Then the PSC Senators and Deputies moved [redacted] into the left benches, giving semblance to their slight majority. B-1

The final vote was 198 in favor of terminating the Regency and restoring the King. This ballot included all PSC Senators and Deputies except two who were absent on account of illness. One Liberal declared that his conscience could not permit him to follow his party colleagues from the hall and that he would vote with the PSC majority.* A parliamentary deputation went to the Palace to express its respects to the Crown Prince, [redacted] absent at his private cottage on the coast. The Prince's flag was hauled down from the Palace and a deputation composed of the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the two Chambers were sent to Switzerland officially to notify the King that his exile was over. B-1

6. SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST RESISTANCE

Although thus legally, and five years plus one day from the time Parliament had declared Leopold to be a King without a throne he was now restored to his prerogatives, the words of M. Rey had a prophetic ring. The Socialists [redacted] B-1

(14) Chambres Reunis: Compte Rendu Analytique, July 14,1950 pp 49, 50.

(*) The total of seats in the Joint Assembly was 387; the PSC - cum - one Liberal majority was 9.

[redacted] declared open war on Leopold. [redacted] B-1

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In his concluding speech on July 19 the leader of the Socialist party, Max Buset, swore that no Socialist would accept any portfolio so long as Leopold was King. He announced that members of his Party would return all decorations and orders they had received and that Socialist Ministers of State would resign their appointments. The party leader concluded his speech by saying, "Leopold III and his party wish a trial by force. They shall have it."

On the following day--the day when Leopold's exile was terminated--the Belgian Socialist party published the following declaration addressed to the Belgian people:

> "The Belgian Socialist party declares that it no longer recognizes Leopold III as King of the Belgians.
>
> "It refuses him any political cooperation either present or future.
>
> "It will remain in opposition until such time as, abdication having at last been obtained, it may be possible for Belgians to reconcile themselves about a King who respects his constitutional duties and the moral bond which, under a democracy, should unite a King to his people." (15).

The Belgian national holiday July 21 passed quietly since the government had decided not to test taut nerves by bringing back the King on this occasion, with both Socialist and Communist militants publically alerting their supporters to be ready for a fight if the King should appear on that day.

7. LEOPOLD'S RETURN

At 7:19 on the morning of Saturday, July 22, King Leopold returned to Brussels. He had departed under armed guard--a German armed guard. He returned under even greater security precautions, although the guards were Belgian. Five thousand troops, three thousand gendarmes, lined the empty highway between the military air field of Evère and the Royal Palace of Laeken. Sentinels were spaced at every twenty meters along this route facing outward to scrutinize a crowd which had not come. The lead car of the cortege bearing the royal standard

(15) Embtel 94, July 20, 1950.
Embtel 100, July 22, 1950.

was not occupied by the King but by two other officers in Generals' uniforms. Behind [redacted] came the monarch [redacted] riding in a Ford. Behind him, too, came the Crown Prince and his younger brother Albert, Prince of Liège. The second wife of Leopold III, the commoner, Princess de Rethy, had remained in Switzerland (15). B-1 B-1

Shortly after his return, at 1:00 P.M. King Leopold broadcast to the nation. He said that his hand was stretched out to anyone, like himself, who wanted to serve his country. For the first time in a broadcast of this type he candidly mentioned the military events of the eighteen days' war in Belgium in 1940 and hailed the war effort of Belgians abroad after military resistance had ceased. His only reference to foreign affairs was to say, "The solidarity which was thus affirmed between Belgians is fortunately maintained after the war between Belgium and the Allies. The collaboration which is affirmed on the occidental and Atlantic scale constitutes a guarantee of prosperity and peace." The King called on the people for concord and a general burying of the hatchet. He said, (16)

> "The King is the symbol of the continuity of the nation. He is a counselor placed above party strife, respectful of the decisions of the majority, attentive to the opinions of the minority. No matter what new tests the future may impose on me, this role will be mine."

Following the broadcast the meeting of a Crown Council was held in the Palace of Laeken. Although the Socialist Ministers of State greeted this invitation with a telegram resigning from the Council, the Liberal members went to the Palace expecting that there would be discussion of the King's policy. When informed [redacted] by Prime Minister Duvieusart that no discussion was expected but that the Ministers would merely listen to a declaration from the King, the Liberal Ministers of State withdrew (16). It was thus to half a Council of the Crown that the sovereign to whom the crown had just been restored addressed his declaration of policy. [redacted] B-1 B-1

8. AFFECT OF ROYAL QUESTION ON U.S. POLICY

[redacted] B-1

(15) Embtel 94, July 20, 1950; Embtel 100, July 22, 1950.
(16) Embtel 107, July 24, 1950.

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[redacted] the Foreign Minister has insisted to the American Ambassador that there will be no change in foreign policy (16). B-1

[redacted] B-1

However, this is in the realm of speculation. Two facts are certain. One is that Belgium is deeply riven on the issue of Leopold as a man and monarch. [redacted] B-1

Another fact which is well established is the vehement Socialist opposition to Leopold, which has found expression in [redacted] resolve not to support any measure of the homogenous PSC government which restored him to power and now maintains him on the throne. We have already witnessed on so important a matter as support of the Belgian government's policy on Korea how the Socialists and Liberals joined with the Communists in declining such support. [redacted] B-1

[redacted] B-1

For the Ambassador:

Robert McClintock

Robert McClintock
First Secretary of Embassy

(16) Embtel 107, July 24, 1950.

CC: London, Paris, The Hague

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